FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Submitted by: Conservation Community

Finding: (*i.e., Conclusions reached after investigation and/or evaluation of facts*)

Most fire ignitions in the Tahoe Basin are caused by humans (Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment, USFS 2000 [Chapter 5, p 438]). There is a need to take measures to reduce the potential for human-caused fires especially during times when weather and environmental conditions increase the likelihood that a fire will burn uncharacteristically.

Background and Supporting Evidence: *(A short statement justifying the Finding and describing desired outcome(s); usually no more than half a page.)*

Investigators found that the Angora Fire started because an illegal campfire from the evening before was not fully extinguished. The Heavenly Gondola Fire was ignited by a cigarette tossed from the Gondola lift. The majority of ignitions in the Tahoe Basin have been caused by humans over the 20 year time frame reviewed in the 2000 Watershed Assessment. Cigarettes and illegal campfires are two primary causes of annual ignitions. Both occur from human activity and thus, are associated with human access. Where humans access the forest, the possibility of an ignition in the forest increases.

One way to reduce the potential for human ignitions is to prohibit those activities which have a greater chance of causing them – 'back country campfires' (those occurring outside of a developed fire ring in an established campground) and smoking in areas prone to high fire danger.

Another way to reduce the potential for human-caused fires during days exhibiting dangerous fire conditions is to limit the access to areas where humans may go to perform illegal activities, to places where fires can more easily grow, and where it will be less easy to extinguish them quickly. Not all days during fire season exhibit dangerous fire conditions. According to the 2000 Watershed Assessment, on average about 10 days per year exceed the 90th percentile values used to assess fire danger. The Angora Fire burned on a day exhibiting conditions exceeding 90th percentile values. Thinning projects are based on success for conditions up to 90th percentile. As we know, fires can roar up

quickly and expand with extreme speed on days exceeding the 90th percentile. The best way to prevent this from happening is to prevent ignitions in the first place. In fact, the USFS prohibited campfires and smoking outside of developed campgrounds in Tahoe's forests for the entire summer in 2007 because of fire danger (http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/news/2007/06/27-fire-restrictions.shtml).

Because ignitions can occur one day, then simmer and "re-ignite" the next (as occurred in the Angora Fire), access limitations should also be implemented the day before forecasted conditions indicate dangerous fire weather.

Recommendation(s) *(Based upon an analysis of the Finding, the following recommendation(s) should be made to the Governors):*

1. **Prohibit access to undeveloped open forest on days where conditions meet or exceed 90th percentile values and the day prior based on weather and condition forecasts.**

2. **Prohibit all smoking in the Basin's forests during fire season.**

3. **Provide more resources to the enforcing agencies (e.g. USFS, State Parks) so they have the ability to better monitor areas for illegal access, campfire use, and smoking.**

4. **Increase the consequences associated with performing illegal activities to a level which provides substantial deterrent.**

5. **Provide agencies with resources to post signs at all common access points relaying information about numbers 1-4 above.**

Impacts of Implementation: *(The implementation of any Recommendation is likely to have specific impacts. Consider potential consequences related to each of the following areas)*:

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

- ☐ Cost – There would be increased costs associated with increased enforcement activities; however, increased fines may help reduce those costs. Reducing ignitions would also reduce suppression costs.
- ☐ Funding source
- ☐ Staffing – More enforcement staff are needed.
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental - Reducing the chance that a fire will start will prevent the environmental impacts caused by uncharacteristic fire.
- ☐ Interagency